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General Assembly

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Fifty-fifth session
Item 123 of the provisional agenda*
Pattern of conferences

Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

Meetings held by regional and other major groupings are provided with interpretation services on an "as available" basis, that is, from existing resources not used owing to the cancellation of meetings of calendar bodies. Certain measures can be taken to improve the likelihood of services being made available and there has been an increase in the percentage of meetings provided with interpretation over the three-year period under review. The rise in requests for conference facilities outside of normal hours continued, and included requests for interpretation services.

* A/55/150.
** The present report covers statistics for the period up to 30 June 2000.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolutions 50/206 A of 23 December 1995 and 51/211 A of 18 December 1996, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide, within the resources approved for conference services in the bienniums 1996-1997 and 1998-1999, interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, taking into account the priority due to meetings included in the calendar of conferences and meetings, and to submit a report on the implementation of those decisions to the General Assembly, respectively, at its fifty-first and fifty-second sessions through the Committee on Conferences. The Committee fulfilled its reporting requirement through its annual reports to the Assembly. A further report on the item (A/53/826) was issued in accordance with paragraph 31 of Assembly resolution 53/208 of 18 December 1998, and the most recent report was A/54/208.

2. Furthermore, in paragraph 11 of its resolution 54/248 B, the General Assembly decided to include all necessary resources in the budget for the ensuing biennium to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice, and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of this decision.

3. The present report, submitted pursuant to the above-mentioned request, contains statistics of meetings of regional and other major groupings held from beginning July 1999 to end June 2000, including a breakdown by regional group.

4. The General Assembly has mandated the Secretariat to make provision in its requests for resources for the servicing of such groups, while at the same time maintaining its decision that services should be provided on an as available basis, that is, without any servicing capacity being specifically allocated for that purpose.

5. The manner in which the Secretariat has addressed these mandates has derived from the actual practice of calendar bodies. Every biennium, several hundred meetings are planned for in its capacity requirements and eventually scheduled. Cancellations of calendar body meetings reduce the number of meetings actually held, thus freeing capacity to service regional and other major groupings.

II. Data

6. For the period 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000, all of the 41 requests for provision of conference services to regional and other major groupings were met at Geneva, or a total of 100 per cent.

7. With regard to New York, for the period 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000, 100 per cent of the 1,194 requests for facilities alone were met. The need for groups to meet outside of traditional working hours continued. In fact, it has escalated owing to the increased volume of calendar and other intergovernmental meetings taking place within the traditional time-frame. As to provision of interpretation services, out of 321 requests, 269 were met, or a total of 84 per cent. At peak periods, however, some meetings were scheduled and provided with services outside of regular working hours, especially after 6 p.m.

8. The main difficulty in providing services during this 12-month period was caused by: (a) an increase in the number of scheduled meetings over previous years, including heavy activity prior to and in preparation for two special sessions of the General Assembly; (b) an increase in the number of meetings with interpretation requested by the Group of 77, although this was somewhat offset by a reduction in requests by some regional groups; and, lastly, (c) a growing tendency towards lengthier meetings of the Security Council and additional meetings of its working groups (62, for example, in the month of June). The latter, of course, is very difficult to predict.

9. A comparative table of statistics for the three reporting periods follows:

	Interpretation services			*Conference facilities*	
	Requested	*Provided*	*Not provided*	*Requested*	*Provided*
July 1999-June 2000	321	269	52	1 194	1 194
July 1998-June 1999	314	262	52	909	909
July 1997-June 1998	348	283	65	535	535
Breakdown by regional group, July 1999-June 2000, Geneva					
Group of 77	18	18	-	18	18
African Group	8	8	-	8	8
Asian Group	1	1	-	1	1
Latin American and Caribbean Group	13	13	-	13	13
Islamic Group (OIC)	1	1	-	1	1
Breakdown by regional group, July 1999-June 2000, New York					
Group of 77	162	135	27	650	650
Non-Aligned Movement	28	20	8	110	110
African Group	50	37	13	119	119
Asian Group	13	12	1	15	15
Latin American and Caribbean Group	16	15	1	16	16
Western European and Other States Group	16	15	1	16	16
Arab Group	-	-	-	89	89
Alliance of Small Island States	-	-	-	1	1
Association of Caribbean States	2	2	-	2	2
Association of Southeast Asian Nations	2	2	-	6	6
Caribbean Community	-	-	-	7	7
Commonwealth States	-	-	-	2	2
Eastern European Group	-	-	-	13	13
Economic Community of Western African States	5	5	-	5	5
European Community	1	1	-	1	1

	Interpretation services			*Conference facilities*	
	Requested	*Provided*	*Not provided*	*Requested*	*Provided*
Central American Group	-	-	-	5	5
Islamic Group (OIC)	7	6	1	8	8
Joint Coordinating Committee of Group of 77 and Non-Aligned Movement	7	7	-	7	7
JUSCANZ (Japan, United States, Canada and New Zealand)	-	-	-	89	89
Landlocked Countries	3	3	-	4	4
Least Developed Countries	1	1	-	2	2
Rio Group	6	6	-	10	10
Southern African Development Community	-	-	-	8	8
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation	2	2	-	4	4
South Pacific Forum	-	-	-	4	4

10. In order to provide services and facilities whenever possible to regional and other major groupings, the Planning and Meetings Servicing Section continued to work closely with the secretaries/organizers of calendar or other meetings with confirmed services so as to have adequate notice of cancellations or other instances where services might not be needed for the full three-hour block. By providing this information ahead of time, more regional groups, which often meet for less than three hours, were able to receive the services they needed. Coordinating this information with the regional groups is the key to providing interpretation when conference services are so stretched.

11. Although the percentages improved from the beginning to the end of the reporting period, there were actually more requests for interpretation, and it was provided more often, during the first year. This is partly explained by the larger volume of scheduled and other intergovernmental meetings in 1999, as mentioned in paragraph 8 above, and to the relative shortage of facilities in the most recent reporting period. Most regional groups do not wish to meet outside of traditional meeting hours.

12. Comparative statistics for previous years by regional group are not available. Anecdotally, however, it is noted that one major grouping of Member States at times convened two or more meetings a day, with interpretation, during the last reporting period. In one particular week, a total of 18 such meetings with services were held, most of them in connection with ongoing sessions. This level of provision could not always be sustained, however, which led to their meeting on occasion with interpretation after regular working hours when this service was crucial to the work and could not be provided at any other time.

III. Conclusion

13. The percentage of meetings held by regional and other major groupings that were provided with interpretation for the period recorded here has risen steadily from 81 per cent during the period 1997-1998 to 84 per cent for the current period, that is, July 1999 to June 2000. An even more flexible approach towards scheduling meetings could have resulted in a higher percentage of services provided, coupled with the vigilance of intergovernmental organizations in planning their meetings well in advance and, whenever possible, releasing unused services. This is still the crucial factor which would enable the most efficient utilization of resources.

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Fifty-fifth session
Item 94 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Macroeconomic policy questions: external debt crisis and development

Letter dated 22 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Honduras to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from the Government of the Republic of Honduras, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a summary report on the national social development projects and programmes being implemented by the central Government (see annex).

This report was prepared in response to a note verbale from the Secretariat, dated 8 October 1998, concerning the submission of national reports on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development.

The report reflects the constant concern of the President of the Republic about the current situation of Honduran society as a result of the natural disaster that struck our country two years ago, known as hurricane Mitch. The Government has formulated a social agenda involving the conduct, in the various sectors of Honduran society, of large-scale awareness-raising campaigns and activities to help improve the prevailing conditions, especially in the most vulnerable sectors in our country.

Accordingly, Honduras has established what could be termed a social development and protection structure, consisting of the following components.

The National Convergence Forum (FONAC) was established to expedite the process of implementing public policies that can be made much more effective through the active participation of citizens.

In addition, the Honduran Social Investment Fund (FHIS) was strengthened to benefit the inhabitants of the country's 18 departments through projects such as the construction, repair and rehabilitation of roads, bridges, river-crossings, drinking water and sewage systems and educational and health care centres.

* A/55/150.

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The Government of the Republic has also strengthened income transfer programmes through the Family Allowance Programme (PRAF), which has benefited 378,349 people in 16 of the country's departments.

The Women's Integrated Development Programme (DI-MUJER) includes training and support for microenterprises, basic infrastructure, retail shops, technical assistance and credit.

The Honduran Community Education Project (PROHECO) is run by an inter-agency commission and is aimed at bringing education to the remotest parts of the country through community participation. It also has the goal of building 2,500 schools by the year 2001.

The EDUCATODOS ("Education for All") programme is being carried out to meet the needs of population groups that have lagged behind in the educational system. Its purpose is to provide literacy training to persons living in rural areas, granting scholarships and vouchers to low-income students.

In the housing sector, Honduras has a National Fund for Productivity and Housing (FONAPROVI), which is a second tier financial institution that provides medium- or long-term financing for production projects and for investment in housing solutions for low-income groups.

The Social Housing Fund (FOSOVI) is a decentralized agency of the Office of the President of the Republic which provides assistance through three special programmes concerning, respectively, the legalization of land tenure, the comprehensive improvement of urban housing and the construction and improvement of rural housing.

In addition, the National Congress has established a Social Information System (SISCO) on the legislation in force in this area.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and the accompanying report circulated as a document of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly under item 94 (c) of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Marco Antonio **Suazo**
for H.E. Edmundo **Orellana**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex to the letter dated 22 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Honduras to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Social situation in Honduras

Summary report on social development projects and programmes in Honduras

June 2000

Introduction

Honduras, like all developing countries, is characterized by the need to undertake a profound social reform involving the restoration of values, the development of skills, the acquisition of knowledge and, especially, a change of attitude. This need is very obvious in view of the downward spiral of poverty that affects most of the population.

Taking into account the country's real capacity to address the current situation, a viable strategy must involve the coordination of actions to make optimum use of the resources available, especially human resources.

The challenges of globalization

Globalization is a concept that encompasses a wide array of trends and forces that are changing the face of the world. As an economic phenomenon, it manifests itself in the replacement of a world of national economies by a world with a single global economy, in which production is internationalized and financial flows cross borders freely and instantaneously.

Globalization is both a cause and a consequence of the information revolution and, in fact, is sustained by the notable advances in telecommunications and the exponential increase in the capacity of computers and information networks. In any event, it is not an isolated process. Regardless of the features it may adopt, it will have serious consequences for the structure and functioning of State entities.

The aspiration of the Latin American and Caribbean countries to compete in the world economy requires them to increase their productivity, in the midst of a change in the technological paradigm, to lay the foundations for improving the population's well-being. The State's actions should be adapted to this new reality. The Constitution of the Republic of Honduras provides that the State shall guarantee to persons under its jurisdiction the right to justice, liberty, culture and economic and social well-being.

Thus, while coordinating the technical and financial efforts of the public and private sectors and of society in general, and directing them particularly towards the most vulnerable sectors of society, we must focus on areas such as education, health and housing.

Our aim is to help our citizens achieve their full potential by attaining a higher standard of living. Among the negative impacts to which special attention must be paid in the context of globalization are the following:

(a) *Change in the level at which decisions are taken.* Globalization imposes a dual process: it transfers some very important government decisions to the domestic sphere and, at the same time, transfers a number of decisions on important aspects of citizens' lives to the regional or local level in each country, through processes of State modernization;

(b) *Porous national borders.* Globalization has, in turn, made the definition of national territories even more difficult. Consequently, governments find themselves forced to redefine their roles and responsibilities with respect to public policy. The growing degree of interdependence requires a series of adjustments in the structure of government.

Social environment

The well-being of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean during the 1980s declined as a result of various factors which caused an increase in the extent and depth of poverty and a deterioration in the living standards of the middle class. In addition, according to reports of the major financial organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the situation in the region as regards income distribution is one of the worst in the world. Our country has not escaped this situation.

International statistics show that poverty increased in Latin America during the 1980s. The fiscal crisis led to cutbacks in public spending on social programmes. Moreover, the effects of the cure, in the form of structural adjustment programmes, led to recession throughout the region and this increased unemployment. All this contributed to a serious situation of poverty and extreme poverty although, depending on the definition used and the manner in which it is measured, the actual figures vary considerably from one part of the region to another. ECLAC reports that in 1980, 35 per cent of the region's population fell below the poverty line and 15 per cent suffered extreme poverty. In 1990, 41 per cent of the population fell below the poverty line and 18 per cent lived in extreme poverty. The situation later improved; in 1997, 36 per cent fell below the poverty line and 15 per cent lived in extreme poverty (ECLAC, 1988). The report of the Latin American and Caribbean Commission on Social Development (1995), known as the Aylwin report, produced at the request of UNDP and IDB, concluded that at the beginning of the 1990s some 35 per cent of the population in the region continued to live in poverty. Whatever figures are chosen, they reveal a very serious situation.

The ongoing concern of the President of the Republic about the situation faced by Honduran society in the aftermath of the natural disaster which struck our country two years ago, better known as Hurricane Mitch, resulted in the formulation of a social programme which encouraged the various sectors of society to embark on a large-scale awareness-raising campaign and to take steps to improve prevailing conditions, especially among the most vulnerable groups: children, youth and women.

The 1994 Covenant for Children, which seeks to promote the development of children and youth, forms part of the current social programme of the National Congress of the Republic.

In Honduras there are 1.5 million young people between the ages of 13 and 25, of whom 49 per cent attend educational establishments and 30 per cent earn income to contribute to the family; the remaining 21 per cent face an uncertain future.

In the social context, the topic of women also occupies an important place. In some areas, women are no longer discriminated against and subordinated as they were in the past but sustainable policies have yet to be worked out to guarantee further improvement in the status and position of women in our society.

Because of the growing garment industry women are increasingly participating in production and are migrating from the countryside to the places where the factories are located. This represents an economic benefit for them but does not always lead to an improvement in living conditions, health care and education. Women generally leave their children home alone or under the care of older children, adding to the unfavourable conditions for their social development.

Social reform

Latin America's social problems, most of which had existed for years, were aggravated by the initial phase of the structural adjustment measures and thus made it necessary to strengthen the State's capacity to protect the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors in addition to fulfilling its general functions in social policy. Efforts were concentrated, on the one hand, on creating a sort of minimal social safety net and, on the other, on improving the delivery of services in the various social programmes, by focusing on the sectors most in need. Thus, Honduras currently has a vast network of social programmes which seek to:

- Promote social solidarity by making financial support available to vulnerable groups through projects that were introduced as temporary measures to alleviate the most serious situations; despite their success, these projects have remained in place longer than initially planned because the situation which prompted their establishment has not been overcome.

- Improve the delivery of social services, in particular health care, education and housing, especially at the local level. An effective public sector should be able to deliver high-quality services to the people. Accordingly, the emphasis has been placed on results and on improving the processes for delivery of services. An attempt has been made to modernize the management of social policies and programmes.

A significant portion of service delivery is carried out by the public sector itself, since there is no way to do so using other providers. In order to improve the services provided by the Government, it will be necessary to enhance the performance, commitment and competence of public officials.

Citizen participation (FONAC)

The way forward is to try to encourage citizens to participate in the formulation of public policies. The key is to present the legitimate demands of the people, especially those involved. Participation in the process of policy formulation should be encouraged and administered in such a way as to establish a deliberative democracy.

Accordingly, the National Convergence Forum (FONAC) was established to expedite the process of implementing of public policies, which can be done much more effectively with the active participation of the people, either by delegation or by entering into a strategic alliance with the State. It is not only a matter of voluntary contribution but of acting as a partner of the State in the delivery of services. In such cases, public programmes will provide an opportunity to organize citizens for participation and execution, helping to develop a more powerful civil society by giving power to its members as a way to improve their standard of living.

The various experiments with participation in the country must be documented and shared with the greatest possible number of organizations and interested individuals. That will encourage the people to participate actively in defining the direction of society, both at a territorial level and in the operational sectors.

The following are some examples of citizen participation in Honduras:

1. The citizen forum and the transfer of the police to civilian authority
2. Elimination of leaded gasoline in Honduras
3. Creation of the municipality of San Francisco de Opalaca
4. Municipal plebiscite on the closing of bars
5. Abolition of compulsory military service in Honduras

Activities to combat poverty/programmes and structures for social protection in Honduras

Honduran Social Investment Fund (FHIS)

The Honduran Social Investment Fund (FHIS) is executing 2,594 projects amounting to 708.3 million lempiras (of which 607.3 million have been disbursed), for the benefit of the inhabitants of the country's 18 departments. The projects relate to construction; repair and rehabilitation of roads, bridges, fords; drinking water and sewer systems; schools; health centres; school equipment; retaining walls and also social assistance and support to municipalities.

Projects being executed by FHIS, January to July 1999

	No. of projects	*Amount in thousands of lempiras*
Social assistance	129	53 671
Water and sewers	454	99 165
Education	902	245 585
Health	43	11 521
Environment	38	25 318
Municipalities	977	255 788
Job creation	5	570
Other	5	570
Total	**2 594**	**708 293**

Based on the decision to focus on the poorest groups and the areas most severely affected by the natural disaster, the Government has strengthened its income transfer programmes through the Family Allowance Programme (PRAF) and the Honduran Social Investment Fund.

Family Allowance Programme (PRAF)

The Family Allowance Programme (PRAF) has benefited 378,349 individuals in 16 departments.

January to October 1999

Subprogramme/project	*Total number of beneficiaries*	*Amount in millions/lempiras*
School voucher — first	100 309	27.0
Third grade		
Extended school voucher	44 652	12.2
Fourth grade		
Mother-child voucher	81 969	26.7
Nutritional voucher	27 784	9.8
Senior citizen voucher	11 167	4.5
School grants	104 252	6.7
DI-MUJER	11 216	23.4
Total	**378 349**	**110.3**

The Women's Integrated Development Programme (DI-MUJER) includes training and support for micro-businesses, basic infrastructure, consumer shops, technical assistance and credit.

Honduran Education Project (PROHECO)

This year a new education project was begun: the Honduran Community Education Project (PROHECO). It is managed by an inter-agency commission, with the goal of bringing education to the most remote communities in the country by means of community participation.

Its goal is to build 2,500 schools by the year 2001. Currently, 500 new schools are in operation with 662 teachers, educating 23,517 boys and girls; in addition, some 3,136 mothers and fathers have been training in 497 educational establishments. Over the next two years 2,000 more schools will be set up, reaching some 100,000 boys and girls in communities with limited resources and no access to drinking water or electricity.

Training

Educatodos

This project is intended to meet the needs of the population groups left behind by the educational system. Its purpose is to provide literacy training for about 100,000 persons living in rural areas during 1999.

Scholarship and Voucher Programme

Scholarships and vouchers have been granted to students with limited resources in the different departments of the country in order to decrease absenteeism and improve school performance:

Type	*Description*	*Number of beneficiaries Coverage*	*Amount/lempiras*
Regular	Mid-level students	5,605 3,847 scholarships	3.8 million
Student voucher	Subsidy for public transportation	70,470 students 47 institutions 10 departments	10 million
Education and productivity	Students in primary basic technical course up to 80 per cent gpa*	2,300 students 112 public schools 9 information centres	6.9 million
Academic excellence	Primary level Secondary level 3 best students from each school and college 90 to 100 gpa	50,000 students 10,000 students	40 million 10 million 47,945 scholarships awarded

* gpa — grade point average.

National Fund for Productivity and Housing (FONAPROVI)

The National Fund for Productivity and Housing (FONAPROVI) is a second tier financial institution created by the Government to provide medium- and long-term financing for production projects and for investment in housing solutions for low-income groups.

Funds are allocated through credit programmes under an open window scheme at fixed interest rates, putting at the disposal of private economic agents financial resources with favourable conditions of payment to facilitate the execution of income-producing investment plans.

Social Housing Fund (FOSOVI)

The Social Housing Fund (FOSOVI), a decentralized agency of the Office of the President of the Republic, is a body which establishes and finances, directly or through intermediaries, the implementation of national policies applicable to the housing sector, its services and human settlements, and monitors the results achieved.

FOSOVI defines its target group as families of limited economic means and it fulfils its task of providing housing assistance and improving rural and urban housing using resources provided by the public sector and other sources administrated by the Fund.

FOSOVI provides assistance through three special programmes concerning the legalization of land tenure, the comprehensive improvement of urban housing and the construction and improvement of rural housing.

National Congress of the Republic of Honduras

Organization of Congress

Working commissions

Members

Presidency

Virtual parliament

SISCO project

Reference documents

Index of projects presented to Congress in 2000

Social Outreach Office
Palacio Legislativo, Tegucigalpa MDC, Honduras
(504) 220 0250 // (504) 220 6920

23 March 2000

webmaster@congreso.gob.hn // orienta@congreso.gob.hn

(This page is constantly being updated. Please pardon any inconvenience)

Social Outreach Office

National Congress of Honduras

Social outreach programmes of the Congress

1998 Report

1999 Report

SISCO Project

Ask for the Social Legislation CD-ROM

SISCO in brief ...

The Social Information System established by the National Congress of Honduras (SISCO) provides a link between the demand for social needs and existing supply. It provides the necessary tools for connecting the needs of civil society with the supply of goods and services available. This service is offered personally by the Social Outreach Office under the aegis of the National Congress and through the Web.

SISCO

Social Information System established by the National Congress

Objective 1

To strengthen the links between civil society and the Social Outreach Office of the National Congress.

Result 1

Civil society will be able to participate directly in areas of interest to it within the National Congress of the Republic, by electronic means and through social services forums.

Activity 1.1

To create an Internet web site providing information on the National Congress Social Outreach Office, whose Internet address is as follows: www.congreso.gob.hn/redsocial.

Activity 1.2

To establish a club for friends of the National Congress. The membership will be comprised of students throughout the country who will have Internet access to the web site: www.congreso.gob.hn/amigos.

Activity 1.3

To establish a Social Services Forum which will consult with interested groups in order to fight poverty.

Activity 1.4

To create the necessary documents to publicize and promote these sites on the Web and set up databases which provide information on the location of public booths where persons may have access to them.

Result 2

Civil society will have regularly updated documents and information on social issues.

Activity 2.1

To produce biannually a CD-ROM on:

(a) Honduran legislation on social issues

(b) Documents produced by the social services forums

(c) Indexes and statistics on poverty, housing survey etc.

This CD-ROM will be distributed among members of the National Congress and the Social Services Forum.

Activity 2.2

To publish a twice-yearly magazine on social outreach, to be named Social Network, containing a summary of the information on the CD-ROM, for distribution to organizations in civil society and to discuss the critical aspects of poverty and extreme poverty, and documents and studies on social issues.

Result 3

Involvement of the spoken, written and television communications media, in the two-way strengthening of communication between civil society and the National Congress since they represent the cornerstone for information at the national level.

Activity 3.1

To provide journalists covering the Legislative Palace with the appropriate information and tools to surf the Internet and the Social Network of the National Congress through a regular series of training courses.

Activity 3.2

To create a data bank with information on the country's chief communications media, the distribution of their programmes and the names of representatives in order to acquire space through which social welfare activities of the National Congress might be carried out and channels for popular participation publicized.

Result 4

The National Congress, through the Social Outreach Office will be able to gather and process data on social needs to link the data to the existing institutional supply and to respond appropriately to any requests received. All this will be carried out through a computerized system which will be able to show the status of each request.

Activity 4.1

To provide a public booth at the National Congress so that persons may access the Social Network and check on the status of their requests, express their opinion on specific topics, receive information on human resources, request interviews and so on.

Activity 4.2

To provide a computer network connecting the office of the president, paymaster's office and social outreach allowing for monitoring of requests for assistance, subsidies, internal mail and use and maintenance of Internet web pages.

Activity 4.3

To create a database of information on the needs and requests processed; this database will be called "Social Demand" and will include information on the needs of each town and municipality in Honduras.

Activity 4.4

To create a database of information on the official bodies involved in providing social services. This database will be called : "Institutional Supply".